

A Word of Advice

Dr. Michael R. McGough
York College of Pennsylvania

Research Premise:

Mastering the cognitive competencies and skills associated with effective instruction never has been, is not now, and never will be enough to ensure that one will be a good teacher. Good teaching is a combination of art, science, intra-personal and interpersonal skills, and a constantly expanding range of professional competencies. In addition, a clear understanding of the profession and a well-grounded appreciation for what it means to be a teacher and what it takes to be a teacher, which constitute the profession's affective attributes, is absolutely essential.

The influence and implications of few professions are limited to a particular workplace or a specified arena of professional practice. Most professions cannot be narrowly defined within the confines of a set of cognitive competencies needed to practice the profession. Instead, most professions, particularly those in public and human services, are as much a lifestyle as they are a career. If the pre-professional, entry-level and novice educator does not possess the cognitive essentials, potential for long-term success is limited. If they possess the cognitive essentials, but lack the affective consciousness and appreciation for the teaching profession, initial success may be found, and long-term mediocrity may be achieved, but the potential for longevity in the profession as a successful, highly qualified practitioner is undoubtedly diminished to a significant degree.

An unlimited and often untapped source of support for affective development pre-professional, entry-level, and novice educators is experienced educators. Their words of advice, both as personal and professional counsel, can provide an experiential base upon which those new to the profession can begin to develop their own level of professional awareness and appreciation. Unfortunately, those with the least experience have the greatest need for it.

Hypothesis:

If given the opportunity to do so, experienced educators will offer a word of advice to pre-professional, entry-level and novice educators. That advice will certainly address content knowledge along with awareness and application of pedagogical methodology, which constitute the cognitive aspects of teaching. That advice will also certainly address the personal traits and professional personality characteristics of teachers, which experienced educators have come to associate with effective teaching. These traits and characteristics constitute the affective aspects of the profession. Both cognitive and affective attributes are critical to and commonly associated with those identified as effective, highly qualified teachers. Although both the cognitive and the affective will be represented in this field of advice, the affective will constitute the largest quantity of advice offered.

In short, when asked to provide advice to pre-professional, entry-level and novice teachers, the advice offered by experienced educators will tend to focus more on how to be a teacher than on how to teach.

Research Rationale:

This research endeavor will produce a compilation of "words of advice" from a field of experienced educators that can be shared in multiple forms with pre-professional, entry-level and novice educators. This compilation of advice will afford valuable insights into both the cognitive and affective attributes of teaching as a profession and a way of life.

Research Field:

The research field for this study will include educators at all levels of practice, those currently practicing or retired, and individual educators from both the private and public sectors. No restrictions will be placed on professional setting or geographic location.

Initial Research Process:

Participants in the research field will be afforded a brief explanation of the research endeavor with no reference whatsoever to the research premise, hypothesis or rationale. All participants in the research field will be asked a single question. That question is, "Given the opportunity to offer a word of advice to someone planning to enter or just entering a career in education, what would you tell them?"

To the degree possible, no further prompts will be offered to those being interviewed and no limitations or qualifications will be imposed as to time, content or potential audience.

Participant responses will be recorded with the aid of a video recorder to capture both video and audio responses. Those being interviewed will be asked to complete and sign a release form titled "Performer Release." Responses will also be taken in written format when video is not possible or not acceptable to the respondent. Those completing written responses will complete and sign the same "Performer Release." Input from no fewer than one hundred respondents will be sought during the initial phase of this research endeavor.

As participant responses are gathered they will be reviewed and processed. Critical attributes of each response will be isolated and charted as to their affective and cognitive characteristics. Specific attention will be focused on four categories of responses. These include content knowledge, pedagogical methods, personal traits and professional personality characteristics.

Video responses will be edited and configured to produce a continuous video production composed of ten segments, or episodes, with each featuring ten individual responses. A written transcript of each video interview will also be produced. Written responses will be edited and developed into a manuscript, each chapter of which will include ten individual responses.

The anticipated outcomes and products of this research will include, but may not be limited to the following:

- a body of information from primary sources related to advice from experienced educators to pre-service, entry-level and novice education professionals,
- a video production titled *A Word of Advice*,
- a book-length manuscript titled *A Word of Advice*,
- a journal-length manuscript(s) titled *A Word of Advice*,
- a professional development seminar(s) titled *A Word of Advice*.

Funding Source:

This research endeavor is being funded by York College of Pennsylvania. A grant of \$1,000 was awarded on February 7, 2003 by the Research and Publications Committee. As required under the terms and conditions of this grant, a formal report on the progress of this research is due to the Research and Publications Committee no later than February 7, 2004.

Current Status Of Research:

As of May 31, 2003 a total of 38 interviews have been conducted. To date all interviews have been completed in the video format. A sample of individual educators in the research field thus far includes:

Christine McGough	Kindergarten Teacher	Biglerville Elementary School
Michael Clemens	Executive Director	Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12
John Spangler	Superintendent	Conewago Valley School District
Eric Hartmen	Fourth Grade Teacher	Ore Valley Elementary School
Marian Sutter	Division Chief	PA Department of Education
Rebecca Speelman	Director of C & I	Conewago Valley School District
Dale Heineman	Principal	Bermudian Springs High School
Whitner Cramer	First Grade Teacher	Leaders Heights Elem. School
Sister Noreen Joseph	Principal	Saint Patrick School
Vicki Phillips	Secretary of Education	Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Valerie Perry	Principal	Columbia Jr.-Sr. High School

Although less than forty percent of the desired number of interviews have been completed to date, the research has produced some observable and reportable findings. These include the following:

1. Thus far 38 individuals have been asked to offer a word of advice. Thus far 38 interviews have been completed without a single rejection.
2. Advanced preparation for the interviews have been minimal. Most participants have come to the interview with nothing outwardly prepared (i.e. notes, cue cards, script).
3. Most interviews have run long rather than short. By initial design, the researcher hoped to get at least a minute from most interviews. Although

some have run less than a minute, most have passed this mark. (As noted above, no limitations or suggestions have been provided to the participants.)

4. Although the question, "What have others said?" has been asked, it has been asked infrequently, and the researcher has provided general answers designed to avoid either specific or suggested prompts.
5. If broken into the categories cognitive and affective, the vast majority of advice offered would fall into the affective category.
6. If the cognitive advice was broken into the categories of content knowledge and application of pedagogical methodology the majority of advice offered would fall into the pedagogical methodology category.
7. If the affective advice was broken into the categories of personal traits and professional personality characteristics of teachers no clear pattern has yet emerged. This is due in part to the close relationship between these affective attributes.
8. Although there have been some position-specific responses, they have been limited. The advice offered shows a marked level of similarity and does not appear to be driven by age, years of experience in education, or current position in education.
9. The advice offered offers significant evidence that those interviewed support a decision to enter the teaching profession.

Conclusion:

It is the intention of the researcher to conclude the initial phase (100 interviews) of this endeavor by December 31, 2003. Prior to February 7, 2004 a detailed summary of the initial phase of this research endeavor will be prepared. As noted above, efforts will then begin to develop a video production, a book-length manuscript, a journal-length manuscript(s), and a professional development seminar(s) titled all of which will be contain the phrase *A Word of Advice* in their title. When phase one has been completed and properly reported, a request will be made for additional funding to continue this research through the Research and Publications Committee of York College of Pennsylvania.